CHAPTER ELEVEN

BLUE LIKE AN ORANGE: ON WRITING, MOURNING, AND ANOREXIA

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For nothing keeps a poet
In his high singing mood
Like unappeasable hunger
For unattainable food
~Joyce Kilmer

“Blue like an Orange” is the central chapter in Hush, a self-styled memoir of cot death. Hush is itself the third draft of a work in progress spanning fifteen years of my writing career. The first draft of this work was a novel, the second draft a memoir and this last version is a hybrid polygeneric text. It is important to mention these generic changes for two reasons. First, because from the outset I wanted to convey to the reader the full experience of bereavement in a social context while imparting the sense of loss this entailed without oppressing him or her. Second, because I also wanted to highlight how the writing process became part of the mourning process. The third version of this work therefore has a performative element that was lacking in the first two versions. Although this performative element came intuitively to me at a moment of crisis when anxiety became overwhelming and I broke into poetry, it later occurred to me that I might learn from this lesson in anticipating the reader’s feelings when tackling emotionally taxing passages. This insight was retroactive. It came to me upon reflecting on the way I had handled my own anxiety half-way through writing Chapter Three (Hecq, 2010). In light of this comment, I offer the reader the creative work first and the exegetical component second.
Blue, like an Orange

We are two abysses—a well gazing at the sky
~Fernando Pessoa

After the funeral I looked for sustenance in the sky. But the light was out to blind me. It fell through the branches of gum trees like numb fingers thumbing through clouds for words to name the wind. All it found were synonyms for blue as though nothing comforts the eye but light and shade pacing through hues and meanings of blue. Lapis-lazuli azure cobalt and navy and sapphire and cerulean. Tearful blue, sad, low, dejected, melancholy, desolate. But most of all lapis-lazuli whose veins yield azure and ultramarine. Azure light enough to allow the sun to flood through. Cobalt, harsh and sharp. Indigo. And ultramarine, a word that tastes of the sea, smooth, salty and warm. Ultra deep. The veined mingling of violet and green, a purple that is almost red, a green that is almost yellow and a yellow that is orange. What I saw in the sky when the rays of the sun lay flat upon my hand was a black sea I dipped into. And ducked out of.

The Mother, for lack of a proper name, formerly myself, listened for the click of the latch in the frame of the front door. She listened for the voice that would ask her a question. She listened and heard a voice.

The wind. The wind yowling.

No words.

What are words for, you ask.

She felt as though she had forgotten what it was like to lift her tongue, what it was like to lick her lips unstuck, what it was like to outlive the cold. To live.

It all seemed to have blown away from her, out of reach of her body, her memory, cut loose. This, she thought, is what it feels like to be dead.

Dead.

The word entered the Mother's head. It took up residence there and multiplied.

How a single word can kill.

My feet pushed her away and across the room, across the passage and into the corridor. Out onto the verandah. Carried her back into a time before that now time. She sniffed the air and fell in a cloud of musty dust. Vanished in the sky.
I could have screamed, but willed her eyes open. It just couldn't be true. The mother was going to wake up to the call of her baby, tune her ear to the sound of people talking in the street, the muffled roar of motorcars passing her window, the clamour of schoolchildren hurrying to school, all in one clap out of this room and into the cold of a brand new morning.

Today—yes, she thought, she will bake a cake, a lemon and almond cake, with lemons and almonds from her trees to celebrate the promise of the brand new day. Today—yes! She will be frivolous. She will dress up and dress the children in matching clothes the way they do in children’s books and women’s magazines. She will go to the market and buy flowers and food. They will listen to market music from the Andes. She will buy bunches of tulips, irises and jonquils as bright and lush as she can find. And she will buy oranges and chestnuts, cherry tomatoes and golden spuds, swedes and parsnips, a tiny pumpkin, asparagus, perhaps. Tarragon and thyme, garlic and ginger. And today—yes! She will surprise them all. Her family.

He will come home at six and he will say *hmm whatever it is it smells fantastic* and he will ask what did our little king do today? And he will kiss the first-born and the Mother and perhaps listen to the answer and then he will open his violin case and play something, something soft and crisp by Paganini and the new baby will look at his father and give him his first smile so that he too can delight as the Mother did in something as fleeting and precious as that. Then they will eat.

What I saw in the sky when the rays of the sun lay flat upon my hand was a black sea I dipped into. And ducked out of, for it was cold.

I ducked out of the black sea of blue for in this life meant to be starting all over again there was an endless series of things to be done, meals to be cooked. All in an endless time of grief not to be done. On hold. Grief in ashes for life’s sake. For the first-born’s sake, the sleeping boy who now refused to speak his mother tongue, the one to whom I’d said *I have you and we’ll get through this* when the night fell on the day of the funeral and our voices hushed and in the immense sweetness of the blue night all I heard was the child, the first one, breathing.

It was a matter of existing within that polarity between the deep centre and the vast periphery. But time would not flow. Time was hard honey. Amber. Ambergris. *Gris* not blue. Blue-grey.

I was a time bomb waiting to explode. Longed for food. Warmth. I felt so cold. At night my want was so strong I stared at the corner between the ceiling and wall, and a single, giant eye would appear. I could not or would not move that gigantic eye. I could not make it blink. My body lay
cold and rigid and empty. Apart from me. I was hollow, and in the hole was that eye, endlessly staring.

I stared into the void in my life. Into the hole in my heart. I devoured books on cot death, filled my ears with interviews of professionals and parents who had been *touched* by it. I read to the child and helped him draw his own story of loss in a ledger adorned with stars. I cooked.

There were pancakes and French toast and brioche. Lemon pudding and orange cake and rhubarb pie and apple crumble. Poppy seed cake. Marzipan. Blueberry muffins. Roasted chestnuts and peppers and eggplants we called aubergines still. Artichoke hearts were preserved, for the child liked the leaves. There were cats’ tongues and profiteroles and jalousies. Gingerbread men and gingerbread stars.

I longed for food, in whatever form. I felt so greedy, and yet it cut me off from the child and from his father too. I would not eat. There was no room for me. I rose and fell. Flailed around me in a sea of black. Lack. Living and wanting to die. I fell into the waterfall of my mind. I had been there before.

Eating and I. Smoking and I. These had been the staples of my life. I had made them my life. One after the other. One the other side of the other. I had blown them up into huge bunches of flowers: irises and daffodils arranged alternately, gerberas arranged in incremental hues of lemon, orange, crimson, scarlet, sienna. Cambridge bells, bluebells, cornflowers, periwinkle and gypsophile. Hollyhocks. Red roses. Petals of blood. Asphodels and lilies and jonquils and hyacinths. Now that part of me had died for real, it felt more difficult to sort out the irises from the daffodils from the jonquils. Spellbound and sickened by the smells, I almost forgot life in the process.

The fear of eating was huge. Palpable. Time would not flow. Time was rock hard. Amber. I was cold and empty. I could not eat lest I implode with guilt or explode with anger. All meaning disintegrated and hit me hard where my heart should have been.

The fear of smoking was thin, like a mist that would surface in dreams. Loving that disposal of greed. Loving that being painted into a corner, you see.

I listened to music. Or tried to. Thought it would fill the hole. I listened to Kinchela’s ‘Mourned by the wind’ and nearly cried. It was a solace as tangible as if some other sentient being had been affirming my own sorrow. But I could not listen. Would not take any risks. No, not then. I asked myself what if I entered down into the numb emptiness of my life.
But saw I couldn’t go there, for the sake of the child. I sensed there was another dimension there. Movement. Space. And absolute nothingness.

Hunger was the obvious answer, like an atheist’s prayer.

I tried writing. Words came in bursts and spurts. Made no sense. I had lost my alphabet in the night sky.

What did I want?
A copyist’s error.

Never before had I asked myself that question.

I was a ghost on a ghost train. Had been on it for so long. It was the story of my life. I knew the terror. Knew the uncanny creatures and their accoutrements, those that spring out at you, always at the same place, same time. Here. Gossamer, the scent of jonquils and hyacinths, diaphanous bodies, ghosts that will knife you in the back. Dead stars dancing before your eyes. Strings of pearls. Fog steaming up. The old woman pushing her cart, not even hiding her scythe. And the fear, always the fear.

I would not cry. The wind blew through the house like in a book I read as a child about a girl who was lost. The wind. Perhaps, I thought, it would crack the lemon tree, the one whose lemons I make lemonade with. The one where ghosts rest and whisper, the wind would crack. Expose the back of the leaves, polish their dust off. All you could hear was the wind.

Words lost. Voice gone.
All had broken with the voice of the dead.

How dare the phone ring.

Consistency, the structures you get used to, make us believe all lies as truth lies strangled by a telephone cord in the late afternoon.

The fear was so strong I bolted for the door and into the street. I ran to the park as fast as incipient thoughts ran through my mind. I ran oblivious to the traffic. Oblivious to time. Oblivious of the cold. I ran to the pond. And stood. When the shadows merged with the waters in the cold pond, when the wind moaned in the branches of the gum trees, when the last ray of sunshine gilded with its mystery the white gardenias and hollyhocks I turned back home.

I did not know what my thoughts were, nor did I know why I had to go through this. All I knew then was that I needed to write for the sheer satisfaction of keeping fear at bay, of experiencing the vanity of meaning, even if words did not make sense.
Blue, like an Orange. The dark is stitched with points of light and all the threads at the back of the sky make the lining of the universe.

It is odd, this urge to write out of fear. Out of the fear of succumbing to sorrow. A sorrow with far more distant echoes that this.

Why do we think and speak?

This is a child’s question, just like why is the sky blue. You should be able to answer it, but can only offer a reprint: blue like an orange.

This is a lie. It is the earth which is blue like an orange. For you can eat oranges as we do the earth. For alongside the hunger for food is a deeper hunger that is thwarted. That’s why you lie. Use metaphors. Fast and write.

And you need to check your thoughts for we christened the stars without thinking they needed no names and the numbers that are comets do cross the dark and land on virgin vines like chains of red pepper that crawl in the wind that whistles soft and sad as a flute in the twilight.

As I wrote, compelled back to the black sea, I felt my heart expanding towards the sky and tears came to my eyes for the first time since death had been.

It is odd our tears, shed or unshed, do not speak, and yet we seem to understand them and the sound of a child scuttling through the front door is sweeter than words.

“Mummy, I’m hungry”.

Like Unappeasable Hunger

In this exegetical part, I contend that writing and anorexia partake of the same economy as they both embody mourning put on hold. Further, they both constitute a mode of survival by way of negotiating the anxiety that loss provokes as loss is bound to reactivate the memory of the loss of the primary object and circle round it. This would seem to illustrate Lacan’s theorising of objet petit a (Lacan 1978 [1963-64], 17) as both the object of anxiety and the final reserve of the libido (Lacan 2004 [1962-63], 119). However, I suggest here that writing as suppléance fulfils the function of stand-in for this lost object that helps the ego cohere by way of
keeping anxiety at bay (Lacan 2005 [1975-76]). Another way of putting this is that writing facilitates the knotting of the Imaginary and the Symbolic by avoiding the lure of the Real in the form of object a.

The problem of how to convey disturbing material such as the experience of grief and associated psychotic phenomena in literary discourse was part of my struggle when writing the central chapter of Hush. Since writing Chapter Three, I had been keenly aware of the need for me to find a safe space to write from, or at least, a safe style that would provide a safe space. This style entailed breaking into poetry at moments of crisis, which meant steering away from the meaning inherent in the metonymic axis of language by making full use of metaphors, fragments and blank spaces (Hecq 2010). What these devices had provided me with was some emotional distance from my material. In other words, I had found a way of creating an emotional distance through aesthetic distance, by way of tropes. Although this begs the question of the difference between semblant (Hecq 2010) and suppléance (Hecq 2011), it is beyond the scope of this paper.

In “Blue like an Orange,” I wanted to show how grief reactivates previous losses, conflicts, anxieties, and thereby old symptoms such as, for example, anorexia nervosa. Though anorexia is a symptom that may manifest itself in different structures (Zentner 1986, 74), I wanted to present it as a symptom of melancholia as I felt my own experience resonated with Freud’s statement in his Draft G (1855). This increasingly made sense as describing the grieving process enabled me to show the origin and meaning of the anorectic symptom while highlighting the phantasm at its core.

So, what is the anorexic’s symptom? The anorexic eats nothing. And this nothing eats her away. Thus what the anorectic body presents to the world even if it is not yet cadaverous is this nothing, which Lacan has called “lack” (Lacan 1992 [1959-60], 139). This lack is, however, that which causes desire to arise. It may therefore be said that the anorexic sustains her desire unto death. Further, although there are three forms of lack in Lacanian theory, namely castration, frustration, and privation, the term “lack” tends to be synonymous with symbolic castration in discussions of Lacan’s work. It is therefore not for nothing that the anorexic woman frightens people away, since she flaunts the spectre of death for all to see. As a writer, however, my problem was not to scare my reader away.

Since symptoms may be seen as having the structure of metaphor (Lacan 2006 [1957], 431), I decided to keep using metaphor as a way of providing aesthetic distance with the intent to discover the deeper meaning
of the metaphor. In addition, I experimented with breaking up linear time and interchange narrative pronouns for emotional relief and aesthetic control. Unbeknownst to me at the time of writing, I also used colours to warn the reader.

Aesthetic distance in “Blue like an Orange” mainly results from the fact that events are related by a lyrical “I” with brief incursions of the third person limited narrator in the past tense that are counterbalanced by a second person narrator identified with the reader in the past historic and also briefly in the present and future anterior. I made these choices because no authoritarian and distancing narrative agency will ever be able to capture the contingencies involved in a writing process which, though actively facing the impact of self-reflexivity inherent in the writing process, gives rise to a personal change. The conventional story narrated in memoirs about grief and mental illness does not indeed communicate the eventfulness of emotional progress, but rather depicts situations occurring along the way that has been clearly marked out. All this adds up to for the reader is the impression of stasis or sheer alienation—and horror. A paradigm for such a type of text has yet to be devised. It calls for two simultaneous yet divergent narrative agencies to allow for the twofold structure of the self in the (re)-making process based on some dialogue intent on expanding and structuring elements, progressive and regressive time axes, and the exchanges between a self and a second hypothetical person. Another, alien and alienating speech would have to be interpolated into the narrator’s own, submerged into it, yet surfacing at odd times with momentum.

The chapter under discussion is about grief, withholding grief, anorexia and writing. It describes the protagonist’s confronting the death of a child and, in flashbacks, the evocation of a pre-existing psychological condition that flares up at this moment of crisis. Loss of speech is hinted at as a possible consequence of the crisis and writing as a way of piecing the self together. Behind the protagonist’s manifest symptoms lies a painfully achieved self-denial, an attempted suicide by starvation, in fact, that is evoked in sporadic flashbacks as part of the narrative procedure of this chapter which is to intertwine two levels of representation. Interpolated into descriptions of a mother’s emotional state on the day after her youngest child’s funeral, are acute flash forwards of her wish-fulfilments as well as flashbacks to key moments of a previous mental illness. The two time levels are intertwined in such a way as the chronology of events is constantly interrupted. The two time levels of representation are kept separate by the use of different verbal tenses and narrative instances. The condensation of the poles of the author, narrator, and protagonist into a
single position in the text is, however, one of the factors that stabilise the narrative as would a mediating text, namely, one that evokes a certain ‘authenticity’ by merging divergent narrative perspectives (author, narrator and protagonist) while defining, albeit at times defying, its reading public. This complex frame, I hoped, would have a stabilising effect.

This stabilising effect of the text is due to the ways in which the literary strategies employed make it possible to describe something which evades verbalisation by not presenting it mimetically. I was mindful to refrain from dismantling formal linguistic structures, as I have also refrained from presenting the dissolution of a clear conception of space and time in the narrator’s mind. Both, however, are integral components of personality dissolution as experienced in acute moments of grief and psychotic crises that may be present in anorexia. What is foregrounded here is the role that writing can play in preventing such dissolution.

The intertwining of two different levels of representation results in the opposition, characteristic of first-person novels, between a narrating ego and a participating ego, but “Blue like an Orange” breaks with one convention of the traditional first-person memoir, namely, the idea that it should be possible to discern a narrating ego which now, looking back, presents itself more experienced. The retrospectively handled realm of the participating ego merges with psychic reality which remains unchanged, and in which the narrating ego is still involved via flashbacks and metaphorical reverberations in the narrative. Both levels of representation, the retrospective level and the narrative embedding of the chapter, merely offer different perspectives on the narrating ego’s unmediated and continuing crisis. Thematically, this is manifested in the way the narrator’s imagination circles constantly around her relationship with food and eventually on how this symptom is translated into her relationship with language. Her initial obsession with some painful rejection of food, far from being overcome on the level of narrative frame (witness the metaphorical overflow and lists of words), is turned into its opposite, expressing itself as an anxiety-ridden insistence on eating:

I longed for food, in whatever form. I felt so greedy, and yet it cut me off from the child and from his father too. I would not eat. There was no room for me. I rose and fell. Flailed around me in a sea of black. Lack. Living and wanting to die. I fell into the waterfall of my mind. I had been there before.

The two levels of representation mirror one another; the narrating ego is neither more mature nor healthier than the participating ego. Indeed, the
text performs linguistic and psychical upheavals from a subjective, interior perspective.

The tensions between the two levels of representation induce different illusions of a time continuum, a phenomenon which may influence the reader’s responses to this chapter, even to the whole book. The retrospective level is marked by the exclusive and consistent use of the historic past, a tense well-suited to comprehensive accounts from a standpoint far-removed in time. During the reading process, however, the reader has to produce mental images which, in turn, she needs in order to build consistency out of the contingent information offered by way of time or narrating persona shifts, metaphorial fughes, use of fragments or mere blanks. The reader’s centre of orientation is of crucial importance for the quality and the amount of mental images produced and her centre of orientation is situated in the narrative frame. Thus the flashback and flash-forward fragments appear, as one reads, to be already in the past, itself appearing as a surreal collage dominated by the sky imagery. An illusion of events occurring in a time continuum is evoked by the construction of a chronology, while the serial arrangement of the individual fragments of narration is instrumental in establishing the illusion of an inner reality akin to, yet divergent from, plot. In fact, the very possibility of plot development is undermined because the narrating ego is constantly being overtaken by her life and emotions. There is no narrative distance between the describing agency and what is described. Events arise and fade away; they are not brought to any conclusion, but coincide with the time required to depict them. In other words, the narrated time collapses into narrating time only to be interrupted at the end of the chapter in the writing itself by the life-affirming words of the protagonist’s child who breaks the narrative frame by entering the story.

Thus, on the one hand, writing can be seen as a defensive operation, for defence mechanisms take on the obsessively repetitive form of primary processes. However, the attempt at articulation in this chapter is the condition for working something through even though it also represents the endeavour of an ego threatened by disintegration to save itself as it founders. Further, the device of different, interlocking levels of representation, the inter-changeability of narrative fragments, and the deliberate collage of pronouns means that the narrative structure does not collapse. The textual strategies are marked by a specific ambivalence. They are both rejection and communication of what cannot be said: rejection in that they are highly structured, and therefore are not a mimetic depiction of psychotic phenomena; communication in that integral components of psychotic phenomena are conveyed by the very nature of
this structure. This ambivalence mimics the structural position of the melancholic anorexic who controls the *nothing* she eats.

The narrating ego’s imagination circulates obsessively and repetitively around the rejection or intake of *anything* that is bound to remain *nothing*, that is, around those areas (and not only the intake of *food*) within which the symptoms of anorexia manifest themselves:

Eating and I. Smoking and I. These had been the staples of my life. I had made them my life. One after the other. One the other side of the other. I had blown them up into huge bunches of flowers: irises and daffodils arranged alternately, gerberas arranged in incremental hues of lemon, orange, crimson, scarlet, sienna. Cambridge bells, bluebells, corn flowers, periwinkle and gypsophile. Hollyhocks. Red roses. Petals of blood. Asphodels and lilies and jonquils and hyacinths. In that order. Now that part of me had died for real, it felt more difficult to sort out the irises from the hyacinths, the daffodils from the jonquils. Spellbound and sickened by the smells, I almost forgot life in the process.

The symptoms are described in their capacity of setting boundaries, and thus endowing the contingent temporal flow of life with a structure that seems to invest it with meaning. The structuring element of the symptoms is at the core of the ensuing metaphorical language partly chosen for their colours, partly borrowed from nature mysticism: flowers are “blown… up into huge bunches…. In that order”. An alienating optical impression is thus given an object which is in itself commonplace, food, since human nourishment, like flowers, may be classified as *natural*, yet cannot be eaten. The innate contradiction necessary to metaphors, not consciously perceived but taken subliminally is the fact that flowers are natural products, but are not (all) edible. Incidentally, the words “petals of blood” refers to the title of a novel by Ngugi Wa Thiongo, alluding thus to the narrating persona’s allegiance to the Symbolic order of wordsmiths.

The optically striking nature of the metaphor translates the ambivalence inherent in psychotic symptoms in discourse: the fascination that arises from the possibility of structuring the contingent flow of time is overshadowed by a sense of disgust evoked by the idea of having to eat flowers, particularly flowers whose colloquial names contain a reference to industrial products (Cambridge bells) or to death (asphodels and hyacinths). Food is here represented, by the specific way in which it is expressed through language, as both fascinating and inedible, that is as *nothing*.

Sensations of physical dissociation are integral parts of psychotic phenomena. Jacques Lacan has coined the term “phantasm of the dismembered body” (Lacan 2006 [1949], 77) to characterise them or, more
precisely, to describe the fact that analysands often dream of dismembered parts of their bodies during phases of their analysis in which they regress far back into realms of indifferentiation. In this chapter the phantasm of the dismembered body surfaces in the protagonist’s phantasies:

It was a matter of existing within that polarity between the deep centre and the vast periphery. But time would not flow. Time was hard honey. Amber. Ambergris. Gris not blue. Blue-grey.

I was a time bomb waiting to explode. Longed for food. Warmth. I felt so cold. At night my want was so strong I stared at the corner between the ceiling and wall, and a single, giant eye would appear. I could not or would not move that gigantic eye. I could not make it blink. My body lay cold and rigid and empty. Apart from me. I was hollow, and in the hole was that eye, endlessly staring.

The optical dimension, which plays a central part in metaphor, is here personified and condensed into a giant eye. However, what is highlighted is no longer the exchange between different sensory areas; instead, the narrator’s sensitivity is undifferentiated, compressed and it encompasses all her physical feelings. As Freud has shown, eyes carry an unusually high affective charge (Freud 1919, 231). Eyes regulate perception, our way of understanding and interpreting the world and, according to Lacan, access to the symbolic order of language (Lacan 2006 [1949]). They are close to the brain, not only because of their location in the body; they are cerebral, they control and structure the secondary process. It is this very function which fails in the passage quoted above: any movement of the eye, which precedes perception, appears impossible.

The spontaneous, subliminal connotation of this image is a sense of paralysis, while paralysis, in turn, is an integral component of anxiety. In combination with the expansive openness prestructured by the textual strategies, these build up a communicational situation between text and reader which may propel the reader into a sense of oppression, of which I was mindful. Emotional reactions to the interaction of topic, textual strategies and metaphors occur within the tensions between what is actually said and what is only subliminally understood, but is present by the very fact of its omission. Thus the recipient reacts emotionally to something not explicitly verbalised in the text.

Anxiety, however, is itself verbalised in the text:

I was a ghost on a ghost train. Had been on it for so long. It was the story of my life. I knew the terror. Knew the uncanny creatures and their accoutrements, those that spring out at you, always at the same place, same time. Here. Gossamer, the scent of jonquils and hyacinths, diaphanous
bodies, ghosts that will knife you in the back. Dead stars dancing before your eyes. Strings of pearls. Fog steaming up. The old woman pushing her cart, not even hiding her scythe. And the fear, always the fear.

Suddenness as a way of perceiving something unexpected, accidental, out of context, entirely new, entirely alien, outside of the planning of anticipation, is one of the forms in which anxiety surfaces in narratives. In this passage, suddenness is suggestively evoked in the metaphor of the fairground ghost train. The reader knows what such ghost trains are, and what it is like to board one. Therefore, she can assimilate the semantic field in question, namely the impact of suddenness, by associating it with certain emotions with which she is familiar. At the same time, however, the emotional dimension of anxiety signalling some subjective dissolution is transferred to a semantic field alien to it. The horror thereby conveyed can be explained through recognition of the incidents that usually do occur in fairground ghost trains; it is thereby weakened and tolerable.

Anxiety phenomena are verbalised in a similar way elsewhere, that is to say by way of transferring it to other areas: ‘The fear of eating was huge. Palpable. Time would not flow. Time was rock hard. Amber. I was cold and empty. I could not eat lest I implode with guilt or explode with anger. All meaning disintegrated and hit me hard where my heart should have been’. The fascination emanating from the rejection of food obviously consists in the opportunity of structuring time through the symptom. Simultaneously, however, there is an underlying dimension of anxiety. According to Søren Kierkegaard (1944), anxiety threatens existence and is undirected, a feeling that overwhelms the person concerned, although no actual cause for it can be discerned; fear, on the other hand, is directed, related to a definite object which is perceived as frightening. In the passage just quoted, what is expressed is not so much anxiety as fear to signal that “anxiety is not without an object” (Lacan 2004 [1962-63], 98). Or to put it differently, anxiety is transferred: modified, named and personified as the fear of breaking a self-imposed rule of abstinence, that is, as fear of something definite. Yet underneath this fear is the anxiety provoked by the desire of the Other (Lacan 2004 [1962-63], 14), the one that threatens to annihilate the subject which the reference to the narrator as ghost anticipates. This ghost also signals the nature of the narrator’s phantasm, which is no other than the phantasm of her own death. Thus the text translates fear into literary discourse, rather than convey the dimension of anxiety which threatens existence. Fear of something familiar and well known is more amenable to description than anxiety which shatters all structures, forms and concepts.
More and more such metaphors are introduced: fear is represented in images, that is to say that anxiety is given an object while at the same time it can be felt as a strange undercurrent to the linguistic imagery. But this very transfer of anxiety to other areas means that no overall pattern will evolve. We are on safe ground.

Here the difference between anxiety as an emotional dimension of human experience and anxiety as it is transformed via tropes for the very purpose of alleviating it shows up clearly; the use of imagery does not wholly solve this problem of incommensurability. Only such metaphors as relate to the symptoms of anorexia nervosa, or the phantasm of the dismembered body, carry subliminal connotations of disgust and paralysis. These alien ideas are able to engender, through their interaction with the other textual strategies (shifts in narrating personas, use of fragments or mere blanks), the openness which can tip over into a sense of oppression, but do not.

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